

Valerian

Valeriana officinalis L. (syn. *V. exaltata* J.C. Mikan)

[Fam. *Valerianaceae*]

OVERVIEW

Valerian has a long history of use in western Europe as a sedative and sleep aid, with medicinal uses dating back to Hippocrates' time (ca. 460-377 B.C.E.). In the U.S., valerian root is widely used in sleep aids and sedatives in various forms including teas, tablets, and capsules. Often, valerian is combined with other herbs traditionally known to promote sleep including hops, passionflower, lemon balm, chamomile, and lavender.

USES

Anxiety; insomnia; sleep disorders; restlessness linked to nervous disorders; enhanced mood based on improved sleep.

DOSAGE

No duration limit has been set for the use of valerian.

INFUSION (tea): 2–3 g of fresh or dried root per cup, once to several times daily.

TINCTURE: 1/2–1 tsp. (1–3 ml), once to several times daily.

EXTRACTS: Amount equivalent to 2–3 g of crude herb, once to several times daily.

TEA OR DRY EXTRACT (sleep aid): Single dose 1/2 to 1 hour before bedtime, with earlier dose in evening if necessary. Adults: Proportion dose according to body weight, as tea infusion or dry extract; Children 3–12 years old: With professional supervision only.

CONTRAINDICATIONS

Consult with a healthcare provider before using in children under 12 years. German pediatric authorities claim that valerian may be used in children age 3 and up, provided the preparations are free of the active compounds valepotriates and baldriol.

PREGNANCY AND LACTATION: Valerian should not be taken during pregnancy because its safety during pregnancy has not been established clinically. Valerian is contraindicated during breast-feeding because of the lack of research in this area. However,



experimental animal data suggest safety of valerian extracts; no adverse effects on fertility or fetotoxicity have been observed.

ADVERSE EFFECTS

Valerian is considered generally safe. Unlike benzodiazepines, valerian appears to cause little or no residual morning sleepiness. However, it may slightly impair judgment and driving ability for 2–3 hours after intake. Adverse effects may include headache and stomach upset, but these effects are rare.

DRUG INTERACTIONS

Valerian may potentially interact with alcohol, barbiturates, and benzodiazepines, but these interactions have not been clinically proven in humans.

Comments

When using a dietary supplement, purchase it from a reliable source. For best results, use the same brand of product throughout the period of use. As with all medications and dietary supplements, please inform your healthcare provider of all herbs and medications you are taking. Interactions may occur between medications and herbs or even among different herbs when taken at the same time. Treat your herbal supplement with care by taking it as directed, storing it as advised on the label, and keeping it out of the reach of children and pets. Consult your healthcare provider with any questions.



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